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Inside C2

Southern DAILY

Make Today Different

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Iran's 'death committee' president unyielding in defence of clerical rule

DUBAI, Jan 17 (Reuters) - As a young prosecutor in Tehran, Ebrahim Raisi sat on a "death committee" overseeing the execution of hundreds of political prisoners in the Iranian capital, rights groups say.

Now president three decades later, and seen by many as Iran's potential next Supreme Leader, Raisi is presiding over an uncompromising response to domestic and international challenges which have seen Iranian courts pass dozens of death sentences.

Four people have been hanged after being convicted on charges related to popular unrest that erupted in September over the death in police custody of Mahsa Amini, a 22-year-old Kurdish Iranian woman. On Saturday, Iranian media said former Defence Ministry aide Alireza Akbari was executed for spying.

The executions triggered condemnation from Europe and the United States, but Raisi has insisted that "identification, trial and punishment" of all those who authorities believe were involved in violence will continue.

"The executions are aimed at creating a republic of fear in which the people don't dare to protest and the officials don't dare to defect," said Ali Vaez, the International Crisis Group think-tank's Iran Project Director.

Akbari, who had acquired British nationality and was living abroad, was "lured back" and arrested three years ago, Britain's foreign minister James Cleverly said this week.

Raisi is overseeing an unyielding crackdown on the unrest, in which campaigners say more than 500 protesters and dozens of security force personnel have been killed, echoes his role in a purge of political prisoners in 1988.

Then, in a few weeks following the July ceasefire which ended eight years of war with Iraq, Iranian authorities conducted secret mass executions of thousands of imprisoned dissidents and opponents of the Islamic Republic.

Inquisitions, known as "death committees", were set up across Iran comprising religious judges, prosecutors and intelligence ministry officials to decide the fate of thousands of detainees in arbitrary trials which lasted just a few minutes, according to a report by Amnesty International.

While the number of people killed across the country was never confirmed, Amnesty said minimum estimates put it at 5,000.

Raisi, then deputy prosecutor general for Tehran, was a member of the capital's death committee, according to Amnesty.

Human Rights Watch, in a report published last year, quoted a prisoner saying he saw Raisi at a prison outside Tehran and that Raisi would go to the execution site to ensure the process was carried out correctly.

Asked in 2021 about allegations he was involved in the



killings, Raisi said: "If a judge, a prosecutor has defended the security of the people, he should be praised ... I am proud to have defended human rights in every position I have held."

The presidential office did not immediately respond to a request for comment on this article.

Iranian officials acknowledged the executions but played down the scale. In February 1989, President Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani said that "less than 1,000 were executed". In 2016, another member of the Tehran "death committee" said, "We are proud to have carried out God's order," state media reported.

"Raisi has been brought up as president for a few reasons, including his brutality, loyalty, and lack of conscience. He showed these characteristics in 1988," said Saeid Golgar of the University of Tennessee at Chattanooga.

"He is entirely on board with political repression."

SANCTIONED BY U.S.

Raisi was born in 1960 to a religious family in Iran's northeastern Shi'ite Muslim city of Mashhad. He lost his father at the age of five, but followed his footsteps to become a cleric.

As a young student at a religious seminary in the central holy city of Qom, he joined protests against the Western-backed Shah in the 1979 revolution. Later his contacts with religious leaders in Qom made him a trusted figure in the judiciary.

Raisi served as deputy head of the judiciary for 10

years, before being appointed prosecutor-general in 2014. Five years later, the United States imposed sanctions on him for human rights violations, including the 1980s executions.

Seeking the presidency, Raisi lost to pragmatic incumbent Hassan Rouhani in a 2017 election. His failure was widely attributed to a then 28-year-old audio tape that surfaced in 2016 and purportedly highlighted his role in the executions.

In the recording, the late Ayatollah Hossein Ali Montazeri, then deputy supreme leader, spoke of the killings. Montazeri's son was arrested and jailed for releasing the tape.

Raisi's 2021 presidential campaign ended in a victory which brought all branches of power in the country under the control of hardliners loyal to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei for the first time in years.

His election win appeared to burnish Raisi's chances of one day succeeding the 83-year-old Khamenei, but some analysts and insiders believe that his failure to boost an ailing economy and his foreign policy difficulties have damaged his prospects.

Khamenei, not the president, has the final say on all major policy under Iran's dual political system split between the Shi'ite clerical establishment and the government.

Raisi "is not driving the repression. He's an instrument of it," ICG's Vaez said.

But his hardline stance, closely aligned with Khamenei, helped guide policy abroad as well as at home.

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WEA LEE'S GLOBAL NOTES

01/16/2023

Remembering Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.



The U.S. government designated the third Monday of January as Dr. King's birthday to be a national holiday.

On August 28, 1963, more than 250,000 people got together at the Lincoln Memorial Park in Washington, D.C. and listened to Dr King's speech, "I have a Dream." With the great national response, the Civil Rights Act of 1964 was passed to end the black and white apartheid policy and discrimination against colored people and women minority groups. This is the milestone for our civil rights movement.

When we look back at history, we all should be so grateful for what Dr. King did for all of us.

Our good friend attorney William Sim came to America in 1960 at the time of black and white racial discrimination.



Since 1964, after the abolishment of racial discrimination and the Chinese Exclusion Act, a large number of Chinese immigrants and students were able to come to the United States. Especially after 1980, many Chinese students and newcomers were then able to come here to be a part of this great country.

Today when we commemorate Dr. King's birthday, we really appreciate what he did for us. Like the predecessors who planted the trees, we gratefully took advantage of the coolness.



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Southern DAILY Make Today Different

Editor's Choice



Britain's Andy Murray reacts during his first round Australian Open match against Italy's Matteo Berrettini. REUTERS/Hannah McKay



An emergency specialist walks among debris at the site where a building was heavily damaged in recent shelling in the course of Russia-Ukraine conflict in Donetsk, Russian-controlled Ukraine, January 16, 2023. REUTERS/Alexander Ermochenko



A drone view of a tree that fell during a winter storm with high winds in Sacramento, California. REUTERS/Fred Greaves



People deal with a flooded street as they check out of a hotel in San Diego, California. REUTERS/Mike Blake



Russia's Andrey Rublev in action during his first round Australian Open match against Austria's Dominic Thiem. REUTERS/Carl Recine



A rescue team recovers the bodies of victims from the site of the plane crash of a Yeti Airlines-operated aircraft, in Pokhara, Nepal. REUTERS/Sulav Shrestha

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

BUSINESS

Vincent Chin Was Killed 40 Years Ago And His Case Still Resonates

Forty years ago, 27-year-old Vincent Chin was enjoying a night out with his friends in Detroit. It was meant to be a celebration ahead of Chin's upcoming marriage, but he didn't make it to the wedding. That night he was beaten to death by two white men who worked in the auto industry and, according to witnesses, were angry over what they perceived as the loss of American jobs to Japanese imports. The men targeted Chin because he was Asian – not knowing he was Chinese American, not Japanese. The killing galvanized Asian Americans across the entire country to fight for civil rights. It's a battle that continues today.

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

The murder of Vincent has become particularly relevant in the past two years, as racist attacks against Asian Americans have risen exponentially since the start of the pandemic. At least 10,905 hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were recorded from March 19, 2020, through Dec. 31, 2021, according to the coalition Stop AAPI Hate.

Chin's death on June 23, 1982, came at a time when the Japanese automotive industry was a flashpoint for racism. Today's hate incidents can be traced in large part to the anti-Asian rhetoric used at the beginning of the pandemic, including that by former President Donald Trump who referred to the coronavirus as "the Chinese virus."

The similarities between the rhetoric used 40 years ago and today present a chilling pattern, says social justice activist Helen Zia, who is also the executor of the estate of Vincent Chin and his mother, Lily.

"That was what was going on in America in the 1980s. And that's why as soon as that callout in the White House was pointing the fingers at China, everybody Asian American knew that that was going to land very hard on Asians in America," Zia told NPR's All Things Considered in reference to the former president's remarks.



Vincent Chin

"So, yes, the rhetoric, the innuendo – it has its impact. And when people are targeted and scapegoated, we know that that's only going to be bad for every American."

The fact that Chin was Chinese American, Zia said, is also telling about how Asian Americans are perceived in the U.S. "Asian Americans have always been lumped together, even though Asia is the largest continent on the planet," she said. "And so when people have hate or anger directed at some nebulous thing about Asia, it doesn't matter. If you're Asian, you're a target. And that's what's going on today. Every different ethnicity of Asian American has suffered the hate incidents that are going on today."

Zia is one of the organizers of the Vincent Chin 40th Remembrance & Rededication happening in Detroit this weekend. Events, including film screenings, public art, performances and panel discussions started on Thursday and go through Sunday.

David Han, commissioner of the Michigan Asian Pacific American Affairs Commission, spoke at the official kickoff event. He told member station WDET the rededication also serves as a reminder that "underneath the surface things are not OK," and that people in power play a role in the safety of the communities they represent.

"In leadership roles of any kind, whether it's the presidency or leaders in companies, leaders in our communities or even

leaders in our churches, the positions and the narratives that different folks speak, based on self-interest as well as fear, certainly impacts the Asian community in America," Han said.



While political leaders play a role in combating anti-Asian American sentiments, so do average citizens. Connecting the older and younger generations through Chin's legacy is another aim of the commemoration.

"The Vincent Chin Legacy Guide" was put together by Zia, with help from the Smithsonian Asian Pacific American Center. It's a teaching tool that tells the story of what happened 40 years ago. It is also meant to inspire people to take action. It ultimately shows why Chin's case still matters today.

"It really stands out as a landmark, not only for Asian Americans – it stands out as a landmark in American history," Zia said. "It's a time when a people in America, who were treated as though they were aliens – those people stood up and said, 'this is wrong. And not only that – we are a part of the American democracy, and we deserve to be treated as full Americans and full human beings.'" (Courtesy npr.com)

Related
Vincent Chin's Death Gave Others A Voice
An Interview With Writer Paula Yoo

Writer Paula Yoo was 13 years old and finishing up seventh grade when Vincent Chin was killed. Chin was a 27-year-old draftsman who was celebrating his impending wedding at a strip club in Detroit, when he was bludgeoned to death by a pair of white men. Those men were apparently upset by their perception that American auto jobs were disappearing as a result of Japanese success in the auto industry. (Chin was Chinese.)

You didn't learn much about Chin's killing when it actually happened — let alone imagine that it would eventually become the subject of one of her books. But as an adult, she became fascinated by Chin's story and how it spurred a new generation of Asian Americans into political action. She started doing some reading and research, which eventually turned into her latest non-fiction book, geared toward young adults, which will be published next month: *From A Whisper to A Rallying Cry: The Killing of Vincent Chin and the Trial That Galvanized the Asian American Movement*.



Writer Paula Yoo

Full disclosure — Paula and I first met in the 90s when we both worked for People magazine in Los Angeles — so I've

known her for years. She's now a TV writer and producer in addition to being the author of several children's books about famous Asian Americans.

Tell us a little bit about who Vincent Chin was, and what happened to him.

Vincent Chin is famous in the Asian American community, his name has resurfaced recently due to the spike in anti-Asian racism. His was the first federal civil rights trial for an Asian American. On the night of June 19, 1982, the night of his bachelor party, Vincent Chin was beaten to death with a baseball bat by two white auto workers in Detroit. Ronald Ebers was a foreman at Chrysler at the time, and his stepson, Michael Nitz, was a recently laid-off auto worker. The reason I mention that is because this happened during the height of anti-Japanese sentiment. The American auto industry was



reeling, due to increased competition from Japanese import cars and mass layoffs happening across the country. Things were especially bad in Michigan, home to the Big Three: Ford, Chrysler and GM.

Vincent was beaten in the head so badly, he lapsed into a coma and died four days later. Before he lost consciousness, he whispered three words to one of the friends who'd been out with him that night: "It's not fair." He was buried the day after what should have been his wedding day.

What happened after Vincent's death? Was there a trial?
More than one. The first was presided over by Judge Charles Kaufman. He gave both Ebers and Nitz three years' probation, fined them \$3,000 and court costs and released them. He later said that they "weren't the kind of men you send to jail."

Citing the fact that neither man had a previous record, Kaufman said that the just didn't think putting them in prison would do any good for them or for society. That "you don't make the punishment fit the crime; you make the punishment fit the criminal."

It's Not Fair!

What was the public's reaction?

Judge Kaufman's lenient sentencing angered not just Vincent Chin's family, but the entire Asian American community. Led by activist Helen Zia, several Asian American lawyers and community leaders banded together to create American Citizens for Justice. This grassroots advocacy organization rallied with several diverse groups—churches, synagogues, Black activists—to protest Kaufman's sentencing.

This inspired other Asian Americans across the country to hold their own demonstrations. These protests resulted in the first federal civil rights trial for an Asian American. In 1984, Ronald Ebers and Michael Nitz were indicted on two counts of conspiracy and violating Vincent Chin's right to be in a place of public accommodation because of his race, and sentenced to 25 years. In the trial that followed the indictment, Nitz was cleared of all charges. Ebers (who held the baseball bat) was convicted of violating Chin's civil rights, and sentenced to 25 years.

But due to accusations of alleged witness coaching, Ebers was acquitted in a second trial held in 1987, in which his guilty conviction was reversed. He would ultimately be found not guilty, and he never spent a day in jail.

You started this book before this most recent surge in anti-Asian violence. Why did you want to write it, and why write it for a young adult audience?

My whole life I always kept thinking one day I'd love to write a non-fiction adult book, like *In Cold Blood*. And I remember everybody that I talked to about Vincent, everybody that I worked with, they all responded with, "This is an incredible story. We know nothing about it." So that's why I think it's a special book not just for adults, but also for teenagers, because I hope that it gives them a firsthand understanding of what this was like.



When I was offered a job at *The Detroit News*, for instance, I remember the first thing my Asian American journalist friends said to me was, "Are you afraid to go live in Detroit because of Vincent Chin?" You know, being Asian American in this country, we're often alone. We're often the only one in our high school or the only family on our block because for many, many decades, we have been a very small part of the percentage of the population. So being an Asian American in this country is very lonely. I've been very lonely my whole life.

Did you do first-person interviews for this book, or rely mostly on archival information?

I have thousands of pages of transcripts from 1982 to 1984; I read every single motion, all the boring stuff. I read everything. I have primary sources. I've actually talked to people who have refused to talk about this case for almost 40 years. And I have exclusive new information. I'm one of the first and only people to have met Ronald Ebers in person in his house. And it was an off-the-record informal visit. So I can't talk about what we talked about, but that was one of the most profound, deep and very disturbing moments in my life.

One of the interesting things about this book is you show all sides of this tragedy. Even Ebers and Nitz. You actually had some compassion for these white men who killed someone who looked like you.

You can have compassion, but compassion is not mutually exclusive from justice. At the end of the day, now that I know the humanity behind these two men, I can have compassion for them. But I can still think, "You still should have gone to jail. What you did was wrong. Justice was not served."



Many people believe that Vincent Chin did not receive justice in the legal sense. But some important things emerged from his death. Tell us what some of those things are.

His death had a tangible effect; he's not just a symbol. It changed manslaughter sentencing in Michigan. Because of Vincent Chin and other cases very similar to his, victims' families are now allowed to deliver a victim impact statement to the judge at a hearing. At Vincent's first trial, the prosecutors were just overwhelmed with cases and they didn't appear in court. Now, because of this, prosecutors have to be at all hearings.

His case also inspired Asian baby boomers. They came of age [about standing up for themselves and other people of color]. This was part of their civil rights education.

Aside from the tangible legal changes that happened in the court system, Vincent's case inspired a younger generation to get involved as activists, as writers, as lawyers going into politics, trying to effect policy change. There are so many Asian American politicians out there now, which is so wonderful! So I think our voice has been raised, our stories, our history, our contributions have been raised. So we've got to go out there and fill in the blanks, because if we don't, who will? (C-NPR)

Southern DAILY Make Today Different

COMMUNITY

Suicide Is The Leading Cause Of Death Among Asian American Young Adults And The Only Racial Group With This Distinction. Why?



Death by suicide is the number one cause of death for young adult Asian Americans. (Photo/Kelvin Murray/Getty Images)

Compiled And Edited By John T. Robbins, Southern Daily Editor

Racially motivated violence looks like the mass shootings that killed Xiaojie Tan, Daoyou Feng, Chung Park, Hyun Grant and Suncha Kim in Atlanta on March 16, 2021. Racially motivated violence also looks like suicide, which is defined as a deliberate act of self-directed violence in order to cause injury to oneself that results in death.

According to data from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, suicide is the 10th leading cause of death in the United States. When broken down by race, suicide is the first leading cause of death among Asian American young adults age 15-24. This is true of no other racial group in this age range in America.

Despite this disparity, very little attention is paid by society and by gatekeeping institutions like academe and private and public funding agencies as to what causes suicidal behavior among racial minorities like Asian Americans. There is not enough research on how to prevent suicide among Asian Americans in particular. What makes this research more challenging to do is that Asian Americans are also the least likely racial group to

seek and utilize mental health services. I am a doctoral candidate studying public health, with a focus on minority mental health disparities research. Here's what I think is important to know about how violence, suicide and disparities all connect to affect Asian American lives.



Determining who might be at risk for death by suicide is a difficult task. (Photo/MStudioImages/via Getty Images)

Beyond risk factors

When an Asian American death occurs by suicide, it is not simply because that person experienced risk factors. Sure, the evidence suggests that the risk of a suicide attempt increases if there are easily accessible means such as guns in the home or if the person knows someone

who died by suicide. But is that the full picture for Asian Americans, or even for other racial minorities?

The truth is, the people who study suicide are still trying to come up with a profile of who is "at risk" in order to precisely predict, and ultimately prevent, suicidal behavior and death. Today, many research dollars go into the development of computer algorithms and genetic biomarkers to precisely calculate who is at risk. Will these methods do justice to the racialized experience of being Asian American in the U.S.?

Only one national study targeting Asian American mental health

So the question now becomes: How can research scientists better understand and develop suicide prevention efforts that precisely address racial minorities like Asian Americans? To answer this question, there must first be research on Asian Americans to study. Unfortunately, the first, only and last study that assesses national epidemiological prevalence estimates of mental disorders in the Asian American community occurred and was published in the early 2000s, nearly two decades ago. Since these data were collected, the U.S. Asian population grew 72% by 2015, making Asians the fastest-growing racial or ethnic group, surpassing Hispanics. In my view, suicide among Asian Americans is a seriously unaddressed problem that could become endemic in a rapidly growing community with little to no direction on how to stop it



Comic Anna Akana discusses stigma about mental health issues in Asian Americans.

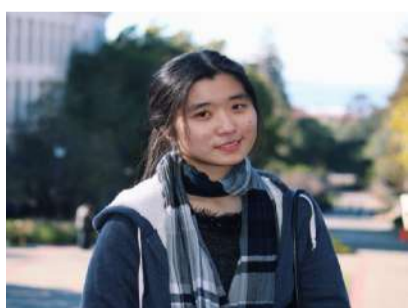
Centuries of Stigma

What if there was a way to scientifically account for racism as the fundamental cause of health disparities? The answer lies in understanding stigma. Stigmatized identity is arguably a universal phenomenon. People who are stigma-

tized are unwanted by society, negatively stereotyped, rejected and excluded, and ultimately othered. Asian Americans have experienced this kind of stigmatization institutionally since the early years of modern America as racial categorizations began to solidify.

As America continues to racialize Asian Americans, it continues a legacy of structural violence and historical trauma. This means that anti-Asian violence exists within the very fabric of American society. It is this societal oppression and violence that becomes internalized into self-hatred, self-harm and ultimately the self-directed violence that is suicide.

When it comes to being Asian in America, though, the story is incomplete with looking only at race. There are plenty of violently oppressive systems that Asian Americans face that pile on the risk of self-directed violence.



These are intersecting in nature. It is the intersectionality, or cross-sections, of Asian American identity that must be closely investigated to uncover insights into suicide prevention for this incredibly diverse community.

Being an immigrant and experiencing xenophobia, for example, is a dominant experience for many Asian Americans. Although many have lived in the United States for several generations, Asian Americans do account for a large portion of today's adult second generation. Second-generation immigrants are people who are native-born citizens in the United States and have at least one parent who is foreign-born.

What makes this important to know?

Current trends indicate that the U.S. is explosively growing into an immigrant-rich nation. More than 36% of all Americans are projected to be of immigrant origin

— that's first- or second-generation — by 2050. By that time, the overwhelming majority — 93% — of the country's working-age population will be of immigrant origin, too. Here's the problem: Second-generation immigrants are considered an at-risk group for suicidal behavior and death by researchers across the world. Researchers aren't fully sure why yet, and that's why this research is so timely.



Signs of suicidal thinking are hard to know. Everyday actions may not change at all. (Photo/Sean Justice/Getty Images)

A complicated and time-consuming issue

Research takes decades to implement. It also takes decades to figure out the problem and how to address it. The public health scientists who work on disparities research are aware of the complex problems facing minority populations like Asian Americans. If there were an intervention to end racism and xenophobia, perhaps many Asian American lives would be saved both from homicide and suicide.

The reality is that white supremacy runs so deep in America that even reversing racism would not undo the disparities in health outcomes such as suicide. This is because assimilation is "traumagenic." That means the traumatic exposures of racist and xenophobic violence and discrimination hold the power to disrupt psychological and physiological functioning and alter genetic code for generations to come. Race-based traumatic stress holds the power to predispose entire populations, entire communities like Asian Americans, to self-directed violence.

In my view, what is left to do is to work to change the norms of inclusion. It won't take years of research to do that. Just start now. Act locally. That's a first step. (Courtesy <https://theconversation.com/>)